

Global warming is moral issue for Rocky

Anderson's 2nd Sundance summit begins Sunday

By [Doug Smeath](#)

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Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson talks about global warming with the zeal of a preacher.



Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson has called global warming "the greatest moral issue of our time."

Matt Hage, Associated Press

Instead of fire and brimstone, he warns of catastrophic hurricanes and floods, droughts, mass starvation, potentially billions of environmental refugees: "It will make Hurricane Katrina look like a picnic."

It is, for him, "the greatest moral issue of our time," an issue that demands religious devotion.

"If we continue along the course of business as usual, we're basically condemning our children and their children to a very dangerous, unhealthy planet," Anderson said. "If we really believe that there's an obligation to preserve our world, whether it's in a religious sense as being God's creation or simply from a humanitarian standpoint, and if we really mean it when we say we have a responsibility to love and care for our fellow human beings, the imperative is clear."

This weekend begins Anderson's second Sundance Summit, a rally of sorts for mayors from across the country. And it's not all preaching to the choir.

Anchorage Mayor Mark Begich said he was skeptical about climate change before attending last year's summit: "I wasn't really a believer or convinced that this issue was really happening or was something that was as important as people were making it out to be."

Now, he's a convert.

"There clearly is something happening, and it's important that leaders of my generation step up and do something about it," the 44-year-old first-term mayor said.

So he is returning to this year's summit, which kicks off Sunday at Robert Redford's Sundance Resort in the Wasatch Mountains. The summit was created

by Anderson and Redford as a way to encourage municipal leaders to take on climate change at the local level.

"Without any national leadership on the issue of global warming under the Bush administration, it is extremely important that leaders at other governmental levels do all we can to reduce the emission of global warming pollutants," Anderson said. "Cities particularly have been great innovators and laboratories in this area and with tremendous success."

Walking the walk

Anderson is regarded internationally as a leader on climate change issues. He has given keynote addresses at U.N. environmental summits, advised the Group of 8 economic powerhouse countries at a global-warming summit and been sought out by members of the European Parliament to discuss the issue.

In Salt Lake City, the mayor has practiced what he preaches, putting into place a host of energy-saving policies. They are all part of his pledge — a pledge made by 300 other mayors across the country — to cut back on greenhouse gas emissions at least to standards set by the Kyoto Treaty, an international agreement the United States has not signed onto.

Anderson switched the city's lamps from incandescent bulbs to more energy-efficient fluorescent bulbs, saving the city \$33,000 yearly and reducing by 1,100 tons each year carbon-dioxide emissions created by electricity generation, he said.

Just before last year's summit, he issued an executive order requiring all city-funded buildings to meet efficiency standards set by the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program. Last week, the City Council passed the LEED requirements into ordinance, meaning they will remain on the books after Anderson's term ends.

The city's vehicle fleet has been revamped: 35 "gas-guzzling" sport-utility vehicles were sold, and the city now owns 89 low-emissions natural-gas vehicles.

Anderson himself drives a natural-gas Honda Civic — "I pay about a third of the price as most people are paying for gasoline" — and he said Utah is the second-easiest state for drivers to find stations selling natural gas, behind only California.

The city now collects methane gas emanating from the landfill and the wastewater treatment plant and uses it to produce electricity, some of which powers half the treatment plant, some sold to Murray's municipal power company.

Teaming up

It was a book that changed Anderson's life: He has been passionate about fighting global warming since reading Al Gore's "Earth in the Balance" shortly after its 1992 release.

"After reading that book, I've read everything I can get my hands on," Anderson said.

Today, he is deliberate in his word choice when touting the need for Americans to make use of alternative sources of energy and conserve energy use. And he can talk about it for hours.

That's where the Sundance Summit comes in handy. This year's summit kicks off Sunday afternoon, with speeches by Redford and former U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright.

Anderson and Redford began to build their plans for the summit shortly after Anderson's re-election in 2003. Redford has been an advocate of fighting climate change since the mid-1980s, but his early attempts to spur action among national leaders were disappointing.

After Anderson spoke with representatives from the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, he brought the idea of a gathering of local leaders to Redford.

Thirty mayors plan to attend this year's summit, from big cities like Sacramento, Calif., to townships like Hamilton, N.J. For some participants, that diversity of opinion is the point.

Begich said that since attending Sundance last year, he has hired a full-time city employee to search for renewable energy sources and implement recycling and conservation programs. And, he said, Anchorage is already starting to see results — in its pocketbook. But he also is an advocate for the oil industry.

"I come from an oil and gas state," Begich said. "I'm a supporter of that activity."

Anderson doesn't see a conflict.

"Even if you're not aware of the implications of global warming, at this point, the kinds of steps that we're talking about toward a solution also would help us attain greater independence from foreign sources of oil, greater national security, greater protection against the wildly fluctuating prices of fuel and electricity," he said. "It will also help us clean up our local air."

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